The Ruth E. Williams Legacy

by Patricia J. Benjamin, Ph.D.

Most AMTA members have heard of the Ruth E. Williams Award for Excellence in Education given to outstanding educators at National Conventions. But newer members probably don't know just who Ruth Williams was and how much she contributed to the development of the AMTA.

Ruth was born in El Reno, Oklahoma on November 8, 1917, and passed away this summer on June 12, 1990. For seventy-two years, she led a full personal and professional life, and served her chosen profession and the AMTA with love and dedication.

Ruth first studied massage in 1944 under the tutorship of Ermal Rothgeb, Charter Member of the newly formed American Association of Masseurs and Masseuses (later known as AMTA).

In 1949, Ruth opened the Atomic Health Center in Kennewick, Washington. By 1953 her husband, Jesse Williams, had entered the massage therapy field and together they managed the clinic and a school until his death in 1977.

In 1947 when Ruth joined the AAMM, there were only sixty-eight members. By the time she served as its President in 1954, the membership had grown to nearly three hundred.

After serving as AAMM President for one year in 1954, Ruth began her work in education as the Chair of the Schools and Colleges Committee from 1955 to 1960.

Ruth E. Williams
1917 – 1990

In 1965, Ruth switched hats to become the National Historian for the association which had changed its name in 1958 to the American Massage & Therapy Association (AM&TA). The entire existence of the AM&TA was within her memory at that time, being a member herself for eighteen years and a student of a Charter Member of the AAMM. In 1968 she wrote a history of the first twenty five years of the AAMM/AM&TA entitled *History in the Making*. This book is a rich source of information about state and national activities during those early years and is being sent to all AMTA chapter presidents later this month in honor of Ruth Williams.

In 1968, Ruth and Jesse Williams established the Tri-City School of Massage in Kennewick, Washington, which is run today by her daughter, Patty Kruschke, and has had AMTA Program Approval for twenty-two years. She presented educational workshops at conventions and conferences nationwide. She also authored a textbook entitled *The Road to Radiant Health* which was published in 1977.

Also in 1977, Ruth accepted the position of AM&TA National Director of Education serving until 1980.

Ruth's contributions to the profession extend far beyond her work with the AMTA at the national level. She also served the state chapter as Editor of the *Washington Massage Journal* and as Secretary-Treasurer for five years, in addition to several terms on the Chapter Board of Directors and as State Education Director.

Ruth enjoyed professional activities beyond the association, and was an advocate of state licensing for massage therapists. She was honored as the first Chairman of the Board of Massage Examiners for the Washington Department of Professional Licensing.

Throughout her life, Ruth balanced family, church and community with professional interests. She and Jesse had four children, followed by fifteen grandchildren and twenty-four great grandchildren.

In 1986, Ruth generously donated boxes of old records, letters, newsletters and journals to the newly established AMTA Archives. Because of her donation, much of the "lost" early history of the AMTA will be preserved for future generations of massage therapists.

Ruth Williams exemplifies the best of what a lifetime career in massage therapy could be. So next time you hear that someone received the Ruth E. Williams Award, remember her story and know that the recipient is being honored by being associated with a truly distinguished leader in massage therapy. ◆